



*A Ministry of the
Church of God (Seventh Day)*

The Second Coming of Christ



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The return of the Lord Jesus Christ is portrayed in Scripture as the most dramatic and spectacular event in history — one that will be witnessed by every human being on earth. These Bible texts describe it:

“For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. . . . They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other” (Matthew 24:27, 30b, 31).

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God (1 Thessalonians 4:16). The Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels (2 Thessalonians 1:7b).

Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him (Revelation 1:7a).

These verses and dozens more proclaim the reality that the last great day of the Lord is sure: Christ will come again, and it will be awesome!

But many people are apprehensive about the Second Coming, especially about events that are often associated with it. They hear talk about the end of the world, the battle of Armageddon, the Antichrist, the mark of the beast, 666, the seven last plagues, and the final judgment of God. These topics are sometimes used to cast the Second Advent in a foreboding light. But they do not tell the whole story.

To His disciples, Jesus spoke words of comfort about His coming: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. . . . I will come back and take you to be with me” (John 14:1, 3b). If we are Jesus’ disciples and trust God, we can also trust Jesus and look forward with great anticipation to being with Him when He returns. Our beloved Savior and Redeemer is returning in person to receive all the saints into His glorious, never-ending kingdom.

For those who refuse to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, His second coming will certainly be a day of fear and dread. But for those who are His own dear children by faith in Christ, it will be a day of great joy and celebration!

Three Descriptions of Christ’s Return

The Greek language of the New Testament uses three words to describe the return of Christ: *parousia*, *epiphaneia*, and *apokalupsis*. Each paints a word picture that captures a slightly different aspect of the manner, purpose, beauty, and awe of His coming.

1. *Parousia*, the word most frequently used, means “presence” and implies arrival, advent, or coming. In common first century usage, it indicated the visit of a prince to one of his provinces.¹ In the context of the Second Advent, it suggests various aspects

1. William Barclay, “The Letters of James and Peter,” *The Daily Study Bible Series* (Westminster Press), 122.

of Christ's coming, like its suddenness and high visibility — as lightning (Matthew 24:27, 37, 39) — and its relation to raising the dead (1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 4:15, 16).

Parousia includes all that is accomplished by Jesus' return. Believers can look forward with joyous anticipation to the day Jesus welcomes us into His kingdom with the words "Well done, good and faithful servant! . . . Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:21). Then we will enjoy His presence forever.

2. The Greek word *epiphaneia* literally means "appearing." As a religious technical term, it refers to a visible manifestation of a spiritual power, either personally or by a supernatural act indicating its presence.²

In 2 Timothy 1:10, *epiphaneia* refers to the first advent of Christ, when He appeared as a son of the Virgin Mary to bring salvation for humanity. In the context of the Second Advent, the word describes the appearing of Jesus as a king to assume His throne. It anticipates His return from heaven to *appear* as a king who comes to judge sinners (2 Timothy 4:1) and to reward with a crown of righteousness all who have trusted and obeyed the Lord. Paul expresses this confidence:

There is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righ-

2. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), 304.

teous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing [*epiphaneia*] (2 Timothy 4:8).

3. The third Greek word, *apokalupsis*, means a “revelation,” an “unveiling,” an “uncovering.”³ Pertaining to the Second Advent, it describes the glory with which Christ is revealed in the clouds of heaven: “This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed [*apokalupsei*] from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels” (2 Thesalonians 1:7b).

Though this revealing of the Lord is a terror to the wicked, it will bring joy and vindication to believers. Peter encouraged believers when he wrote, “But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed [*apokalupsei*]” (1 Peter 4:13).

What a picture of the arriving King rewarding His followers and assuming His throne in the full, unveiled blaze of God’s glory!

Resurrection of the Saints

All believers anticipate the Lord’s second coming because all who have died in Christ will be raised from their graves to receive immortal bodies. At the same time, the living who honor Jesus as Savior and Lord will be transformed so that all may live in

3. W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Thomas Nelson Publishers), 964, 965.

immortality and glory with Christ forever. The apostle Paul wrote:

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

Additional details are in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, which affirm that the resurrection will happen at "the last trumpet," at Christ's coming:

Listen, I tell you a mystery: we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:51-54).

From Paul's texts we can determine that

1. Deceased believers will be resurrected to eternal life when Jesus returns.
2. At the same time, believers who are alive at the return of Jesus will be transformed to immortality and glory.
3. Both the living and the resurrected saints will behold Christ's glorious re-

turn and will dwell with Him from that time throughout eternity. This is the blessed hope of every Christian.

Paul's teaching is not the first time in Scripture that the thought of our Savior's appearance on earth is linked with the hope of new bodies for believers. Job's description of the Lord's coming and his own resurrection amaze us because they were given so long before Christ's rising from the dead and before the teachings of Apostle Paul.

The ancient, Job, while not enjoying the clarity of the New Testament view of redemption and bodily resurrection through Christ, expressed remarkable confidence in a Redeemer who would someday justify him and undertake for his ravaged flesh:

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes — I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! (Job 19:25-27).

This may be the only Old Testament text that links the primitive Hebrew hope for life after death with the personal appearance of a messiah/redeemer figure.

Paul's words to Titus speak of the Lord's return and our resurrection, using other words:

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this

present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11-13).

In this text, the “blessed hope” of every believer is a clear allusion to the promised resurrection of the dead. Our Christian hope is not an immortal soul that departs to heaven when we die. Rather, the Bible teaches that the dead wait in their graves until the resurrection at Christ’s return. For more information on the subjects of the state of the dead and the immortal soul, request our free booklet *Death and Immortality*.

Judgment of Believers

The second coming of Christ is also closely connected with the Bible’s teaching about judgment. God’s judgment is thorough; no one escapes!

Jesus stated boldly:

“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:28, 29).

And Paul wrote:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

But Paul also wrote about the righteous dead being called from their graves and

joining the living to meet Jesus in the air as He descends from heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). From this text, there appears to be no pause in Jesus' coming that would permit Him to quickly convene a lengthy judgment of individual saints.

Why? Do the saints escape God's judgment?

The teaching of the gospel is that those who are in Christ were already judged at the death and resurrection of Christ: "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification [acquittal]" (Romans 4:25). As long as they continue in Christ, believers stand blameless and righteous before God. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1). Because we are justified — acquitted — of all our sins through faith in Jesus Christ, we stand guiltless before God. Our relationship with Christ makes us righteous: "God made him [Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Through faith and trust in Jesus, God credits (imputes) the righteousness of Christ to us. As God looks at us through the blood of Christ, He sees the righteousness of Christ in us. In Christ we are declared holy, without blemish or accusation in the sight of God (Colossians 1:21, 22)!

Because of the imputed righteousness of God, we will already have been judged righteous when Jesus comes. If we are presented holy and without accusation before God, we do not need to stand before Him in judgment as sinners do. We can be secure

in the knowledge that “The Lord knows those who are his” (2 Timothy 2:19b) and that “whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24).

In fact, Paul affirmed that in Christ, Christians are already seated with Him in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6). As justified, raised, and seated believers in Christ, let us rejoice and anticipate the return of our Savior!

Judgment of Sinners

On the other hand, those who reject Jesus as Savior and Lord will face God’s judgment, with all their sins still hanging over their heads. Their judgment will be a sorrowful experience. Jesus described it:

“There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out” (Luke 13:28).

Paul wrote:

God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled . . . This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be

marveled at among all those who have believed (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10a).

Paul warned the sinner, “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23a).

Revelation 20:11-14 pictures the great white throne judgment at the end of the one thousand-year reign of Christ when unbelievers will be raised from the dead to be judged. This judgment results in the “second death” — the eternal destruction of sinners: “The lake of fire is the second death” (v. 14b). Earlier in the chapter the righteous are pictured as having already been given everlasting life; they are not subject to this “second death” (v. 6). But “Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire” (v. 15).

How dreadful it will be to perish for eternity! That’s why it is so important to prepare now, while one still has life.

Time of Jesus’ Return

Regarding the time of His return, Jesus plainly stated, “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. . . . The Son of man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (Matthew 24:36, 44) and “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority” (Acts 1:7).

Despite Jesus’ definite statements in this regard, church history is littered with failed predictions about the time of Christ’s second coming. Even in our day many students have thought they could discern what is not known even by the angels. By setting dates,

they have discredited the Word of God, discouraged those who know that Word, and disgraced themselves.

Others claim that the second coming of Jesus will be preceded by a time of chaos and trouble in the world and that certain signs will indicate that His return is near. Many cite Jesus' prophecy in Matthew 24:

“You will hear of wars and rumors of wars . . . Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places” (vv. 6a, 7).

Seeing these events all around, we're tempted to conclude that Jesus' return must be imminent. Yet Jesus continued: “See to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come” (v. 6b) and “All these are the beginning of birth pangs” (v. 8).

These events were not intended as signposts that would enable Jesus' followers to create a timeline for predicting His return. Fighting, famine, and earthquakes have occurred since sin entered the world in Genesis 3. Some people claim that they are getting worse today, and possibly they are. But Jesus did *not* say that their *increase* could be used to predict the time of His return. Rather, these “signs” should remind believers of every generation that we live in a fallen, sin-filled world and should not be surprised at calamities of nature and conflicts among men and nations. We should know instead that our only certain hope is in Christ — that He will return one day to bring peace to this earth and reward His followers.

Other prophecies are thought by many believers to provide a final signal for Christ's second coming: the much-anticipated great tribulation, the revival of the beast powers of Revelation 13, the enforcement of the mark of the beast, 666 (vv. 16-18), the rebuilding of a temple in Jerusalem, and a climactic battle of Armageddon in modern Israel. But all of these events will probably not occur in some predicted fashion and sequence just prior to Christ's return. And it is possible that some of them are already history.

But suppose that these events are yet to come. The question is, Within how long or short a time will they occur before the Second Advent?

Consider that in 1948, when Israel became an independent state, many predicted that Jesus must come within a generation of that event, based on Matthew 24:34: "This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened." Confidently affirming that a generation would be about forty years, they expected Jesus to return by 1988. We are now well beyond that date, and Jesus has not yet come!

Jesus spoke adamantly about the uncertain time of His return: "No one knows about that day or hour." Prophecy is important, but it was not given to predict tomorrow morning's headlines, to scare people into acknowledging Christ, or to lay out a timeline of events and dates leading up to the Second Coming.

However, Jesus did give His disciples a principle for interpreting Bible prophecy: "I am telling you now before it happens, so

that when it does happen, you will believe that I am he" (John 13:19). This text suggests that we may be better able to match the prophecy with an event after it has passed, rather than trying to predict when that event will actually happen. A review of how Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus' first coming confirms that such prophecies can be understood only after they've been fulfilled. But trying to look into the future and learn when and how something will happen is risky business.

Any idea that biblical prophecy reveals the year, month, week, day, or hour of Jesus' coming is not biblical. Using prophecy to calculate when Christ will return is misguided. But what is certain is that all of us, individually, could die at any moment. For us, that will be the second coming of Jesus and the day of judgment.

Jesus could come this very day! Are you prepared?

Constant Readiness

The apostles admonished believers more than once to be faithful and patient as they anticipate the return of Christ, but waiting is not easy. Trying circumstances arise that cause saints to long for that day. Furthermore, some perceive a delay in the Lord's coming, and many even scoff at the idea that it will ever happen. People scoffed in the first century, which the New Testament writers thought of as the last days. Consider Peter's warning:

You must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and

following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is the 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation" (2 Peter 3:3, 4).

By misinterpreting prophecies of the coming of the Lord, some become discouraged and lose faith in His return. Others may turn cynical and doubtful because they have been disappointed by a failed prediction. Some do not want their lives interrupted by Christ's return because of their unbelief or pursuit of earthly goals.

Jesus warned, "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap" (Luke 21:34).

If you delay preparing until you see Him coming, you will have waited too long. Read the words of Jesus about this matter:

"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man" (Matthew 24:37-39).

To be ready for the return of the Lord, we must surrender our lives to God through believing in Christ *before His return*. Today is the day of salvation. Believe it! Act on it!

How to Prepare

Jesus instructed believers to live every moment as if it were the last before His coming:

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

. . . So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (Matthew 24:42, 44).

“Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. . . . What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’” (Mark 13:33, 37).

The word *watch* in these verses is not about watching world events to try to figure out when Jesus will return. It urges believers to watch themselves that they do not get caught up in sin and unbelief. Jesus stressed this in Luke 21:36: “Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”

In a parable in Matthew 24, Jesus told His followers about a master who put his servant in charge of his household and then departed on a journey for an unspecified period. Suppose that servant began to live a selfish, sinful life of debauchery. Jesus said, “The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him . . . He will cut him to pieces . . .” (vv. 50, 51). Unlike this wicked servant, a wise and faithful servant will be busy doing the Master’s will at all times. Jesus said of such a per-

son, "It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns" (v. 46).

Other parables, like that of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), the talents (vv. 14-30), the sheep and the goats (vv. 31-46), and a man taking a journey (Mark 13:34-36), all remind us that we do not know when the end will come for us — whether by our death or by Jesus' return to this earth. So we must always be busy doing His will.

The Bible gives basic steps for preparing: Confess faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God; acknowledge His death, burial, and resurrection as atonement for your sins (Romans 10:9); repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

If you will place your full faith and trust in the Lord for your eternal salvation, and if you will walk in loving fellowship with Him and with others according to His Word, then you may anticipate the return of Christ with great hope instead of fear (1 John 4:17-19).

Jesus said, "Yes, I am coming soon" (Revelation 22:20). May our response be "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

Questions for Review and Discussion

1. What will be the most dramatic and spectacular event to be seen by every human being? _____
_____.
2. Fill in the blanks: "The Lord Jesus _____ from heaven _____ with his _____ (2 Thessalonians 1:7b).
3. Jesus told _____ to not _____ about His coming.
4. For whom will Jesus' second coming be a day of fear and dread? _____
_____.
5. What three Greek words in the New Testament are used to describe Christ's return? _____, _____, and _____.
6. What reward does Paul and his fellow believers expect? _____
_____.

7. "Listen, I tell you a _____: we will not all _____, but we will all be _____" (1 Corinthians 15.51).

8. " _____ has been swallowed up _____" (v. 54b).

9. What is the hope of every Christian?

10. The Bible teaches that the dead will wait where until the resurrection?

11. Select the best answer to this question:

Why do the saints of God escape the final judgment?

- a. Those in Christ are already judged.
- b. Because of Christ, they are blameless and righteous before God.
- c. Jesus died for their sins and was raised to life for their justification.
- d. God credits the righteousness of Christ to them.
- e. All of the above.

12. Select the best answer to this question:

At Jesus' return, what will be the condition of those who reject Him?

- a. Their sins will still not be forgiven.
- b. Their judgment will be a sorrowful experience.
- c. They will not be allowed to enter God's eternal kingdom.
- d. Their punishment will be death (destruction) in the lake of fire.
- e. All of the above.

13. How many know the day or hour of Jesus' return? _____. Who is that one?

_____.

14. Regarding tragic world events, Jesus said, "See to it that you _____. Such things _____, but the end _____" (Matthew 24:6b).

15. Why do some become discouraged and lose faith in Christ's return? _____

_____.

16. Jesus warned, "Be careful, or _____ will be weighed down . . . and that day _____ unexpectedly _____" (Luke 21:34).

17. What must we do to be ready for Jesus' return? _____

_____.

18. Name two parables that remind us that we do not know when Christ will return.
_____ and _____
_____.

Answers

1. The return of the Lord Jesus Christ.
• 2. “is revealed . . . in blazing fire . . . powerful angels” • 3. His disciples . . . be anxious. • 4. For those who reject Jesus. • 5. *parousia*, *epiphaneia*, and *apokalupsis*. • 6. A crown of righteousness. • 7. mystery . . . sleep . . . changed.
• 8. Death . . . in victory. • 9. That both the living and the resurrected saints will behold Christ’s glorious return and then dwell with Him throughout eternity.
• 10. in their graves. • 11. e. • 12. e.
• 13. only one: God the Father. • 14. “are not alarmed. . . . must happen . . . is still to come.” • 15. Because of misinterpreted prophecies of Christ’s coming.
• 16. your hearts . . . will close on you . . . like a trap.” • 17. We must surrender our lives to God through believing in Christ before His return. • 18. Choice of parables: a servant left in charge of his master’s household; the ten virgins; the talents; the sheep and the goats; a man taking a journey.



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